



# KEY WORDS IN INSTRUCTION

## Blogs and Blogging, Part I

by Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson

This article (Part I and Part II) examines a relatively new use of technology through blogs and blogging, defines related key words, and analyzes how this form of communication is impacting library media specialists, other educators, and students.

From humorous teen journals to serious scientific peer review, blogging has become a fast-growing online activity. As a Web-based communication tool, a blog is simply a Web log. In most cases, a single author writes and posts short articles displayed in reverse chronological order.

These blogs are generally open to the public, and visitors are encouraged to comment on the author's entries (see Figure 1). Educators, however, can easily restrict access depending on the nature of the learning activity.

### The Popularity of Blogs

According to a recent report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, over half of all American teenagers create content for the Internet including blogs (2005). The study further states that nearly 20% of twelve-

to seventeen-year-olds have created their own blogs and nearly 40% regularly read blogs (2005). Teen bloggers, particularly older girls, are most likely to have experience with almost every online activity. As a result, many students are already familiar with the use of blogs.

Although often associated with news

punditry and personal journaling, blogs also can provide a rich environment where students can share the process and products associated with information inquiry activities.

State and national learning standards stress the importance of authentic student experiences and blogs can be used for this purpose. For example, the National Council on Economics Education has identified standards regarding how economic issues affect the lives of workers, consumers, and citizens. A blog could be used to highlight members of the Chamber of Commerce and their contributions to the local economy. Students would have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss key issues with these community members.

David Warlick is an educational consultant and owner of *Blogmeister*, a popular blogging service for educators. He stresses in his book, *Classroom Blogging: A Teacher's Guide to the Blogosphere*, that students develop better communication skills when they are authentically communicating and encourages educators to promote writing skills through student-published blogs that invite outside comments (2005).

Figure 1



Annette Lamb, a Senior Lecturer and Adjunct Professor for Online Course Development, and Larry Johnson, an Adjunct Professor at the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University at Indianapolis provide additional information about blogging on their website (<http://escrapbooking.com/blogging/>).

### The Basics of Blogging

Unlike many technologies that are time-consuming to learn,

blogs are easy to set up and use. No special software or skills are needed, and they can be accessed anywhere, anytime from the Web. Many free or low-cost online services make blogging accessible to all educators. Because blogs can be accessed from any computer with Internet, school library media specialists are using them as a tool for instructional activities as well as communication with teachers, students, parents, and the community.

Blogs can contain Web links, graphics, video, and audio, so many educators are finding them easier to maintain than traditional websites for class projects. Many schools are incorporating video, audio, or podcasts (that can be downloaded to iPods and other MP3 devices) as part of blog-based electronic class or school magazines.

Blogs also can be used to provide open comments and feedback to students. Because student entries are stamped with the date and time of their completion, teachers can easily monitor and trace student activities. Furthermore, because all blog entries are archived, it's easy for teachers to assess student work or ask students to review and reflect on their own progress.

Multiple blogs can be created for varied purposes such as reading groups, science experiments, or school library media center news. A blog can be used to facilitate learning and experiences beyond the confines of the classroom such as virtual guest interviews or book discussions that extend beyond the school day.

Blogs can be used to facilitate authentic learning experiences, motivate and engage learners, and promote literacy skills across

the curriculum. In addition, they encourage reading and writing for an audience, allow quick feedback from many types of readers, and encourage peer interaction and collaboration. Blogs also can be used to ask meaningful questions, stimulate new questions, encourage alternative ideas, and promote interaction and sharing of process information and products.

Before using blogs in a specific teaching or learning activity, library media specialists should consider the strengths and limitations of this technology. Blogging requires access to the Internet and basic keyboarding skills. In addition, students should be mindful of the larger public audience of blogs and be encouraged to write as if their parents were reading over their shoulders.

## **Blogs as Information Resources**

Classroom teachers and their students can easily be overwhelmed with the millions of blog entries available on the Web. Consequently, the challenge of the library media specialist is to partner with teachers to design effective learning activities that help students locate, evaluate, synthesize, and use the information available on blogs.

Many students follow National Geographic's *WildCam Africa* project that includes a live video camera located at the Mashatu Game Reserve in Africa. Students can watch elephants, zebras, and other animals at a pond, and then post comments and ask questions on a blog. Wildlife researchers post information and answer questions. Similarly, the

*FalconCam* in Cleveland, Ohio, is focused on the nests of peregrine falcons and students use *Cecilia's Nature Blog* to trace the activities of the falcons and their chicks.

Existing blogs can be used to provide information and insights related to specific subject area topics. Many government and nonprofit agencies use blogs to disseminate news about their programs. For instance, readers of the *Bird Treatment and Learning Center* blog are able to trace the rehabilitation of injured, sick, and orphaned wild birds.

Stephen Downes, a senior researcher with e-Learning Research Group in New Brunswick, Canada, states that blogging isn't really about writing. Instead, it is about reading what is of interest to you: your culture, your community, and your ideas. It is engaging with the content and with the authors of what you have read including reflecting, criticizing, questioning, and reacting (2004).

The following categories reflect the types of bloggers and blogs students are likely to encounter:

- Diarists, storytellers, experience trackers
- Scholars, hobbyists, and enthusiasts
- Institutional outreach representatives
- Journalists and news reporters
- News pundits, advocates, and columnists
- Public figures and personalities
- Subject area and professional specialists
- Learners

Increasingly, library media specialists are using aggregators to help them organize the

wealth of information generated by blogs. These aggregators let users select, categorize, and present the RSS (Rich Site Summary) feed from a blog in a blog reader rather than going to the individual blog websites (see Figure 2). Many library media specialists regularly follow the blogs of popular young adult authors such as Laura Halse Anderson and Neil Gaiman who maintain blogs.

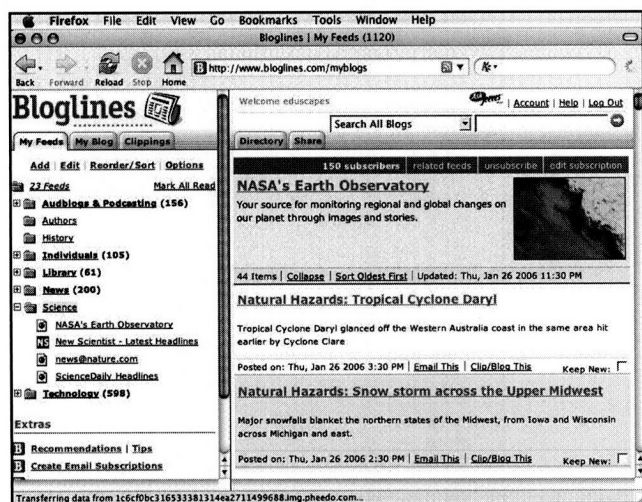


Figure 2. Blogging in Information Inquiry.

Annette Lamb identified nine activities to promote high-level thinking using existing blogs:

- **Activate.** Motivate with blogs. Use a blog as a catalyst to generate interest in a new topic. Help students see the excitement and energy that can be found in a subject.
- **Connect.** Provide a context or establish a connection. Bring relevance to the discussion by using a "real world" situation or example found in a blog.
- **Critique.** Critically evaluate an idea or perspective by using examples to support a position. Many of these examples can be found in professional blogs.
- **Deepen.** Add depth to a

learning situation through a detailed explanation, thoughtful observation, or new resource that provides additional information or insights. For example, use a law blog to learn more about law and ethics.

- **Expand.** Broaden thinking by providing an alternative perspective or different point of view. For example, use blogs from different countries to examine cultural differences.
- **Fresh Look.** Use blogs to provide current, immediately relevant examples. For example, get the latest science or fashion news.
- **Inform.** Provide primary sources or data that help ex-

plain an idea already presented. For example, you can track earthquakes and volcanoes. Consider a statistic or graph that illustrates a point.

- **Launch.** Look for blogs as a place for new, innovative ideas. Be the first to present a new idea rather than simply commenting on the work of others. Ask questions to keep the new idea going.
- **Synthesize.** Bring a number of ideas together. For example, consolidate these comments and draw a new conclusion (<http://escrapbooking.com/blogging>).

## Blogs and the School Library Media Specialist

Many library media special-

ists are using blogs as a way to communicate and collaborate with their students, teachers, parents, and professional peers. They may post photographs of school library media center activities, announce media fair opportunities, or share interesting new materials. In schools where the procedures for updating websites have become cumbersome, blogs are sometimes used as the virtual presence of the library media center displacing the more traditional website. Other library media specialists are using blogs to host online reading groups and cross-generational interactions and discussions, and to facilitate virtual expert and author visits.

Frances Jacobson Harris maintains a blog called *Gargoyles Loose in the Library* that provides news and views from the University Laboratory High School Library in Urbana, Illinois. She suggests that a blog can be the spot for library news, updates, and communication to the public. Harris notes that library blogs may have a single purpose such as book discussions, book clubs, library construction projects, summer reading programs, class assignments, or homework. School library blogs also can be a vehicle for active learning (<http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/library/blogging/>).

An increasing number of library media specialists and other educators are using blogs as tools for professional communications. For example, Doug Johnson's *The Blue Skunk Blog* and Joyce Valenza's *Neverending Search* provide excellent resources and information for library media specialists seeking ideas and professional connections.

In some cases, library media specialists are using blogs within professional development activities. Teacher-librarian Christine Maccarella created the *LPS Bloggers* project as part of a sustained professional development activity at Livingston Public School in New Jersey. She involved teachers with discussions such as the role of blogging in schools, young adult literature, and blog integration. Participants receive credit for completing online activities along with implementing and evaluating their own classroom-based blog projects with students ([http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger\\_id=5336&new\\_display\\_count=1000](http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=5336&new_display_count=1000)).

Larry Johnson integrated blogging into a Web-based course for library media specialists. The blog, *SLMS Bridging Theory and Practice*, invited experienced library media specialists to share their expertise in areas such as grant writing, budgeting, center promotion, technology, and leadership.

### For Further Reading

- Bartlett-Bragg, Anne. *The Knowledge Tree: Blogging to Learn*. [http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree/edition04/pdf/Blogging\\_to\\_Learn.pdf](http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree/edition04/pdf/Blogging_to_Learn.pdf)
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- Build Communication and Research Skills." *Teacher Librarian* 30, no. 2 (December 2002). [http://www.teacherlibrarian.com/tlmag/v\\_30/v\\_30\\_2\\_feature.html](http://www.teacherlibrarian.com/tlmag/v_30/v_30_2_feature.html)
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- Kajder, Sara, and Glen Bull. "Scaffolding for Struggling Students: Reading and Writing with Blogs." *Learning & Leading with Technology* 31, no. 2 (2003): 32-35.
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- Pew Internet and American Life Project. *Reports: Family, Friends & Community*. [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report_display.asp)
- Richardson, Will. *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*. Corwin Press, 2006.
- Warlick, David. *Classroom Blogging: A Teacher's Guide to the Blogosphere*. LuLu, 2005.

### Educator Blogs

- 2 Cents Worth by David Warlick. <http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/>
- <http://classblogmeister.com/>
- Blog of Proximal Development by Konrad Glogowski. <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog>
- Blue Skunk Blog by Doug Johnson. <http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/>
- Connectivism Blog by George Siemens. <http://www.connectivism.ca/blog>
- Educational Bloggers Network. <http://www.webn.weblogger.com/>
- Kathy Schrock's Kaffeekatsch. <http://kathyschrock.blogspot.com/>
- Librarian in the Middle. [\[beiffert.net/wordpress/\]\(http://beiffert.net/wordpress/\)

LPS Bloggers by Christine Maccarella. \[http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger\\\_id=5336&new\\\_display\\\_count=1000\]\(http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger\_id=5336&new\_display\_count=1000\)

Marc Prensky's Weblog. <http://www.marcprensky.com/blog/>

Neverending Search by Joyce Valenza. <http://joycevalenza.edublogs.org/>

One Trick Pony by Bernie Dodge. <http://webquest.org/bdodge/>

Remote Access by Clarence Fisher. <http://remoteaccess.typepad.com/>

SLMS Bridging Theory and Practice by Larry Johnson. <http://slmsbridge.blogspot.com/>

Web Logg-ed by Will Richardson. <http://www.weblogg-ed.com/>](http://www.</p>
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### School Library Media Center Blogs

- Armstrong Library at Neil Armstrong Elementary School by Mr. Fritz. <http://armstrong-library.blogspot.com/>
- Book Break from Berkley High School Library Media Center by Ms. Spear. <http://www.bookbreak.blogspot.com/>
- Gargoyles Loose in the Library by Frances Jacobson Harris. <http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/library/blog/>
- Grandview Library Blog by Sarah Chauncey. <http://www.grandviewlibrary.org/>
- Mabry Middle School - Media Center Blog by Mrs. Hendrix. <http://mabryonline.org/blogs/media/>
- The Reading Room from Northfield Mount Hermon School. <http://nmhlibrary.typepad.com/>

### Other Blogs to Explore

- Laura Halse Anderson. <http://www.livejournal.com/users/halseanderson/>
- Bird Treatment and Learning Center. <http://birdtlc.blogspot.com/>
- Cecilia's Nature Blog. <http://falconcam.apk.net/blog/>
- Neil Gaiman. <http://www.neilgaiman.com/journal/journal.asp>
- WildCam Africa. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/wildcamafrica/>